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D I S S U A S I V E

FROM

Sabbath-Breaking ;

Deliver'd in a

S E R M O N

ON

April the 22d, 1733.



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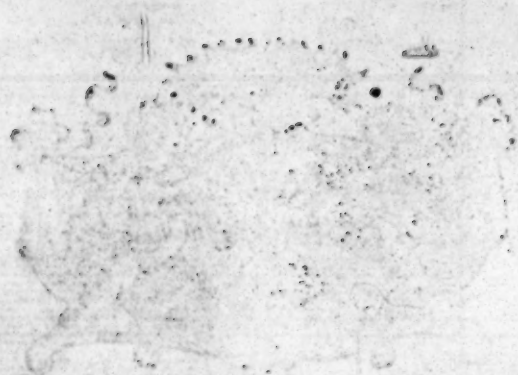
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DISCUSSIVE

Sabbath Brethren

SERMON

April the 2nd 1783



CAMBRIDGE

Printed in the Year 1783

NEHEM. XIII. latter Part of Ver. 17.

*What evil thing is this that ye do, and profane
the Sabbath-Day?*



AFTER this manner do we find the zealous *Nehemiah* expostulating with his irreligious Countrymen. The Children of *Israel* had but lately obtained their Deliverance from a seventy Years Captivity; they had just taken down their *Harp*s from the *Willows*, to visit their beloved *Sion*; had just seen their Temple rebuilt, and a new *Jerusalem* rising out of the Ruins of the old; it might have been expected therefore, that, while so many Mercies were yet fresh upon their Minds, they could have been in no danger of forgetting their Duty to that Almighty and Gracious Being, which so compassionately beheld their Affliction, when they sat weeping by the *Waters* of *Babylon*; *Psal.* cxxxvii. 1. But how difficult is it to keep ourselves uncorrupted, where we are exposed to evil Communication! So long a Commerce with Pagans had perverted the Worshippers of the true God, and left them but little Zeal for the Per-

formance of religious Obligations; for, notwithstanding the pious Example of their good Governour, and the great Care with which he was intent upon reforming their depraved Manners; in spite of the diligent Reading and Exposition of the Law of God to them, and the solemn Covenant with which they had newly bound themselves to an Obedience to it, (of all which we have an Account in some of the preceding Chapters of this short History;) we find them returning to those Profanations of God's Honour and Laws, which, during their Captivity, were become habitual to them; and that an Irreverence little better than heathenish, still kept possession in the midst of Judah. In those Days, saith Nehemiah, *for I in Judah some treading Wine-presses on the Sabbath, and bringing in Sheaves, and lading Asses, as also Wine, Grapes, and Figs, and all manner of Burdens, which they brought into Jerusalem on the Sabbath-day, and I testified against them in the day wherein they sold Victuals. I contended with the Nobles of Judah, and said unto them, What evil thing is this that ye do, and profane the Sabbath-day? Did not your Fathers thus, and did not God bring all this Evil upon us, and upon this City? Yet ye bring more Wrath upon Israel, by profaning the Sabbath;* Ver. 15, 17.

Such was the Remonstrance of an holy Man against the Impiety of his Country; and tho' the Success of it is not particularly related, yet

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is there sufficient Reason to infer from some Passages in the Sequel of the History, that he had the Happiness to see it effectual, and to find the Grievances he complained of, immediately redressed.

Every one of you must perceive what is to be the Subject of the present Discourse, and I cannot doubt but that many kind Prayers are already put up amongst you for the good Success of my Undertaking. There is scarce a Precept in the Divine Law in which the Honour of God, the Interest of Religion, and the Good of our Souls are more deeply concerned, than in that Commandment which teaches us the Reverence we owe to the Sabbath; and I appeal to every Man of common Observation and Experience, whether the Regard or Disregard with which that particular Day is treated, has not a remarkable Influence on our whole Lives and Conversations; I mean, whether the generality of People do not manifestly live either with or without a Sense of Religion, according to their Behaviour in that single Instance. If the Case be thus, and an habitual Violation of this one Commandment will gradually lessen, and at length perhaps quite extinguish our Regard for every other Christian Duty, how incumbent is it upon me, whose Office requires me to watch over you in all things, to edify you both by Exhortation and Example, and, if your Circumstances make it necessary, even by Reproof, to imitate the Freedom taken by
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the good *Nehemiah*, and to bear my Testimony against that scandalous Abuse which prevails amongst us, of the Day which God hath made holy; that profane and shameless Dissoluteness which shews it self through every Stage of Life, which, by sowing the Seeds of Vice and Irreligion among our very Children, trains them up to a corrupt and profligate Manhood, and at last too frequently ends where it would be almost a Miracle if it did not end, in an ignorant, hardened, impenitent Old Age? The Sabbath, instead of being observed as a Day of Rest and Devotion, we too often see a Day of Noise and Tumult. A Command to do no manner of Work, is interpreted by Multitudes amongst us as a Licence to deny themselves no manner of Diversion. During the Evening-Service of the Day, while the Church is half empty, Publick-Houses are full. Children, instead of being instructed at Home in their Duty to God and their Neighbour, are suffered, without Correction, to pursue their Play in the Streets; while Numbers of all Ages, by joining in some unseasonable Exercise in the Fields, are doing all they can to become a Scandal to the Religion they profess, and to confirm themselves in Lewdness and Ignorance.

If there be any Truth in this Representation, the Picture I am sure is a frightful one, and will furnish us with ample Matter of Humiliation, as perhaps the best amongst us, how much soever we may disapprove of this Licentiousness in our own
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private Judgment, may be still conscious of having done less than we might have done, in order to suppress it. My own Remissness I acknowledge with some Shame, in having so long forbore this public Application to you. I long flatter'd myself indeed that so open a Remonstrance might have been unnecessary, and that the Reformation I wished for, might have been gradually brought about by personal Rebukes and Admonitions; but I shall learn from the numberless Disappointments I have met with, and from the continued Violations of God's holy Commandment, to entertain a more humble Sense of my own Authority and Influence. I confess my Weakness, and am convinced that no Opposition I can singly make, is of Strength enough to encounter this reigning Evil. From hence proceeded my Resolution of addressing myself to you. I saw my self too feeble to contend alone with so powerful an Enemy, and was therefore desirous of being strengthened with your Alliance. And if I can persuade you to engage heartily in a Confederacy with me, there can be no Danger but our united Endeavours might be crowned with Success. If every one will watch over the Behaviour of his own Family, the Disorder we lament will be easily redressed, the Honour of God's Law will be preserved, the Day he hath set apart for his Worship will from henceforth be spent agreeably to the Design of its Institution, and your selves will soon reap the Benefit of your Care, in
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the Comfort and Satisfaction of your own Minds, in the Diligence and Faithfulness of your Servants, in the Obedience and hopeful Dispositions of your Children.

As I should rejoice to make myself in any measure instrumental to the Attainment of these desirable Ends, I would willingly urge you to do your parts towards the Accomplishment of them, from the strongest and most engaging Motives that can be thought of. What Method therefore shall I pursue? what Course shall I take to render my Exhortation effectual? I might shew you the Reasonableness of setting apart some Portion of our Time for the Worship of God; but that you are already convinced of. I might collect the many Precepts which are dispersed in the Sacred Writings, requiring you not to defraud God of the Honour due unto his Name, and shew you the Importance of that Duty, which consists in reverencing the Sabbath, from its being made the Subject of a particular Commandment: but these things too you all sufficiently know; and I am persuaded the most hardened Offender amongst us would not presume to argue for the Innocence of his Practice. I might give you a Lecture upon the Manner in which the Sabbath ought to be kept; but which of you will pretend to want Instruction upon that Head? It cannot be unknown to the most ignorant among us, that if on that Day we are commanded to desist from all worldly Business, and to rest from the ordinary Works of our Callings;

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we are much more obliged to abstain from tumultuous Sports and Recreations. We all know that it is our Duty to consecrate that Day to the Service of Religion, by Exercises of Piety and Devotion, by joining in the Offices of the Church, by private Prayer, by Reading and Meditation; in short, not only by taking heed to our own Behaviour, but by having regard to that of our Families, and not suffering it to be profaned by any under our Authority.

All these things I have largely insisted upon at former Occasions; and if I had never done so, they are the most obvious Lessons which Reason and Religion teach. At present I have no design to lay these Foundations again, but shall think myself happy, if I can employ any Inducements powerful enough to engage you to act agreeably to the Knowledge which I am assured you already have.

To let you see my present Intention then in one View, I shall press you to pay a more strict and religious regard to the Sabbath from the following Reasons:

First, That you may avoid giving offence to Persons of separate Communions,

Secondly, That you may thereby more effectually promote your own Good. And,

Thirdly, That of your Children.

Upon the two former of these Heads a few Words will suffice.

There is nothing which could in a greater degree have advanced the Credit of Religion, and the mutual Edification of the Christian World, had they been so happy as to have practised it, than an exact and universal Obedience to the Apostolical Exhortations, beseeching them to walk all by the same Rule, to speak all the same Thing, striving together for the Faith of the Gospel, and endeavouring to keep the Unity of the Spirit in the Bond of Peace. But it pleased God to permit the Enemy to sow Tares in his Field, which must, in all human probability, grow together with the Wheat until the Harvest. It is my unfeigned Belief, that a purer Doctrine, and more agreeable to that delivered to the Saints by Jesus Christ and his Apostles, is no where to be found, than that taught in the Church of *England*; yet you know upon what various Pretences many Persons have thought fit to desert her Communion. It may be concluded, I need not doubt, from your Presence here, that you are convinced no Dissenters, of whatever Denomination, have sufficient Reason to vindicate their Separation from us; but of all their Objections, there is not one I am more solicitous to see inexceptionably confuted, than that which they sometimes draw from the Negligence

ligence of our Lives, and particularly from
 the little Reverence we pay to the Lord's day.
 I am sure I have often had the Mortification
 to be reprov'd by them for suffering those A-
 buses of it, which it was by no means in my
 power to reform. But if my Intreaties have
 any weight with you, this Scandal shall be re-
 moved. We may well blush to have Exam-
 ples of religious Life propos'd to us from the
 midst of those Separatists, whose Errors we com-
 miferate; but whenever this is done, upon
 you it will lie to answer the Reproach. Has
 our Lord and Saviour done less for us than any
 other People, have we less Interest in his glo-
 rious Resurrection, that we take less care than
 others to sanctify the Day, which the Christian
 Church hath appointed to be kept holy as a
 weekly Commemoration of it? With what
 Countenance can we boast to a Dissenter of the
 Purity of our Doctrine, or expect to see him
 reconcil'd, while we confirm his Prejudices by
 the Looseness of our Practice? How wisely,
 how piously, how primitively soever our Church
 may teach, we may assure our selves the best
 Arguments for recovering those who are fallen
 off from her, would be the religious and ex-
 emplary Lives of her Members. I beseech there-
 fore, and exhort every Person to wipe off, as
 far as his Authority, and a careful Life will
 enable him, this Scandal and Reproach from
 the Christian Name; and to make himself up-

on the Lord's-day especially, an *Example of the Believers in Word, in Conversation, in Charity, in Spirit, in Faith, in Purity*; 1 Tim. iv. 12.

The Second Argument I shall use for a religious Observation of the Sabbath, is the Tendency of it to promote your own Good.

In an Assembly of Christians sure I may advance it for a Maxim, that it would be greatly for every Man's Advantage, to live under the continual Guidance and Conduct of Religion. There can be no Dispute, concerning the Wisdom of the Choice, whether it is preferable to serve God or Mammon. Whatever therefore shall help to confirm us in our Obedience, to keep up a Sense of our Dependance upon God, and preserve a reverential Awe of him in our Mind, does in the same manner contribute to the Advancement and Security of our Happiness. Now this is the delightful Fruit you cannot but gather from a right Employment of the Lord's-day. How agreeable must it be to the truly religious Man, when he has been wasting himself in the Business of the World, and has for six Days together eat the *Bread of Carefulness*, on the seventh to find his Retreat in the Sanctuary, there to unload himself of his Cares, to lay aside every Weight, and seek Refreshment in him, who invites to him the weary and heavy-laden? *The Name of the Lord, saith the Wiseman, is a strong Tower,*

Tower, the Righteous runneth into it, and is safe;
 Prov. xviii. 10. There would be no danger, methinks, of any Man's suffering his Thoughts to launch out too far into the Troubles of this Life, who would carefully recal them every Lord's-day to a Consideration of that which is to come. And if there is Truth in the Divine Promises, your temporal Interest will fare the better for not neglecting that which is eternal. *How rarely do we see the Righteous forsaken, or his Seed begging Bread?* After spending your Sabbaths, not in the Vanities of the World, but in the Worship of that God to whose Goodness you are indebted for all the Days you live, you may return to your worldly Employments with a more rational Assurance that Success and Blessings will attend your Labours, and may be encouraged with the joyful Expectation that while you are providing a comfortable Subsistence for this Life, you are laying up, at the same time, a better, and more enduring Substance in Heaven.

I come now, in the last Place, to be an Advocate with you for the Good of your Children, and to beseech you for their sakes, to treat the Sabbath with a becoming Reverence.

And this Head I shall insist upon more largely, because, as I presume all of you have really their Interest at Heart, I cannot but hope for some good effect from representing to you
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how greatly their both temporal and eternal Good may depend upon your Conduct in this Particular. Which of you, to speak in the Language of our Blessed Saviour, *Matth. vii. 9, 10. if his Son ask Bread, would give him a Stone; or if he ask a Fish, would give him a Serpent?* Alas! how many are like those unnatural Parents, without reflecting upon, or perceiving their Cruelty? In a literal sense, I believe, there are few so destitute of natural Affection, as to be capable of this Inhumanity. As far as the Body is concerned, it may be almost universally true, *That a Woman cannot forget her sucking Child, that she should not have compassion on the Son of her Womb.* But is bodily Food the only Sustenance which the Wants of Children call for? Surely they have their spiritual Necessities likewise; there is a kind of Hunger and Nakedness of the Soul, of which Instruction is the proper Food and Cloathing, and which it is as barbarous to deny them, as Meat and Raiment for their Bodies. There is what the Apostle calls, *a Milk of the Word*, suited to their tender Appetites, that is, certain easy Lessons in Religion, adapted to the Years and Capacities of young People. What shall we say therefore of those inconsiderate Parents who withhold from their Offspring this necessary Nourishment? Who, when the Capacity of their Children to receive Instruction, does, as it were, in the Words of Solomon, cry
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after Knowledge, and lift up its Voice for Understanding; Prov. ii. 3. stop their Ears against its Importunity, and suffer them to grow up in Ignorance, no less deplorable than that of the People of Nineveh, without learning any Distinction between Good and Evil? When I see young Persons who were born in Christian Families, admitted into Covenant with God by Baptism, entitled to that Redemption which came by Jesus Christ, and capable by timely Care and Instruction of being made wise unto Salvation; when I see them in danger of forfeiting all these Privileges, and living equally Strangers to Religion and Decency, without Government, without Instruction, profaning the Sabbaths more out of Ignorance perhaps, than Impiety, and, in short, permitted, without check or controul from either Parent or Master, to follow every bad Example they shall meet with, to walk in the ways of their own Hearts, and in the sight of their own Eyes, I cannot forbear applying to them the Lamentation of the Prophet, *The precious Sons of Zion, comparable to fine Gold, how are they esteemed as earthen Pitchers, the Work of the Hands of the Potter!* Even the Sea-Monsters draw out the Breast, they give suck to their young ones. The Daughter of my People is become cruel; The young Children lack Bread, and no Man breaketh it to them; Lam. iv. 12, 3, 4. How pathetic a Description is this of the Inhumanity of those Parents,

Parents, who, when the Wants of their Children do in a spiritual Sense *ask Bread, give them a Stone*? Now suppose we should see them carrying their Cruelty one degree farther, and not only defrauding them of suitable Instruction, but corrupting them by their own bad Example, would they not then compleatly answer our Saviour's Question, and when their Son asks a *Fish*, deceive him with a *Serpent*? The evil Example of the Parents is the most deadly *Serpent* by which the unhappy Offspring can be stung. We all know the busy Nature of Children, and how forcibly they are drawn to an Imitation of those with whom they chiefly converse. A personal Resemblance is not more frequently transmitted to them by their Parents, than that of Behaviour and Conduct. How conscientiously then ought you always to remember that you are the Originals from whence your Children write, and that every Defect they shall observe in you, will in all likelihood be propagated in the Copy, and transcribed into their Life and Manners?

From hence then be prevailed upon to see the Necessity of keeping holy the Sabbath-day: For if it be of the utmost importance to your young Families, to be early instructed in the Nature of God, and religious Duties; if the sooner the Seeds of Virtue are sown in them, the more glorious Harvest they will produce; if you have been the means of bringing them
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into a World abounding with Folly and Extravagancies, where they are on all sides surrounded with Enemies, and if not guided by your Caution and Advice, in danger of being led astray by numberless Temptations; if it is a greater Cruelty in you to suffer them, by contracting Habits of Wickedness, to perish everlastingly, than to lose a temporary Life by running into the Fire, or falling into the Water; if moreover you must be answerable for every Sin of theirs which you might have prevented, before your Father which is in Heaven; — by all these important Considerations I intreat you to reflect whether the Sabbath does not claim a higher Reverence from you, than it is customary with us to pay to it. For if you neglect this, what other Opportunity can you find of planting that Christian Knowledge in your Families, without which they can have no Title to be considered as belonging to the great *Household of Faith*? Good Instruction indeed is never out of Season, but if you have no Leisure to impart it on that Day, which God himself hath sanctified, and which the Christian Church hath in all Ages devoted to religious Uses, I fear there is little Reason to believe you will make up the Defect, by borrowing Time from your worldly Affairs, when the Obligation upon you is less. Are you desirous the young People under your Care, should understand that they owe any Duty to God, and that if they hope to

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prosper, it behoves them to live in his Faith and Fear? Instruct them in that good Lesson by your own Behaviour: Let them see you paying the Distinction which is due to the Lord's-day, by removing all Levity from your Carriage, by abstaining from your usual Recreations, by your constant Attendance upon the public Worship, and religious Exercises at Home. By thus appearing to live yourselves under the Influence of Religion, you will win all those you have to do with more effectually to the Practice of it, than by a thousand Arguments. The Children and Dependants in every Family will chearfully submit to any Restraint, which the Master of it imposes upon himself. By living in this good Order, they would learn to look upon Religion as the most important Business of Life; and consequently, would think it their Duty to employ every Lord's-day in gaining spiritual Improvements, which otherwise would be made so many Sacrifices to Sin and Folly.

I do not question but that in a Place where the Lawfulness of any kinds of Recreation has been thought perhaps by many to have little or no dependance upon Times and Seasons, some will be prepared to argue with me, and object that I am for carrying their Restraint too far; that though they should allow it to be criminal not to treat the Sabbath with Reverence, in Persons of riper Sense and Judgment, yet they

they can see neither Crime nor Inconvenience in continuing the usual Indulgence to Children. Let this Matter then calmly be considered. Children, while they continue such, whatever Liberties they take upon the Lord's-day, can scarce be chargeable with Sin ; but I think it evident to a Demonstration, that the Consequences of this Liberty may be extremely fatal to them. Do you believe they have immortal Souls, and that this Life is only an Introduction to their endless Happiness or Misery ? If so, you cannot certainly forgive yourselves, if you do not labour, some time or other, to imbue their Minds with a due Sense of Religion. When therefore will you begin ? Will you defer sowing the good Seed, till the Soil is over-run with Weeds ? Will you find less Difficulty in rooting out evil Habits, than in preventing them ? Or do you conceive it will be ever easier for you to infill into their Minds a Love of Virtue and Goodness, than while they are untainted with wicked Customs ? Will your Advice, your Authority, your Correction, have more weight with them at any time, than in their Infancy ; or will they ever submit more willingly to any Confinement you would impose upon them ? Was there any room to hope that being permitted to abuse the Sabbath in their Youth, would incline them to keep it more religiously when they were grown up, we might securely leave the Virtues of the Man to atone for the Offences of the Child :

But if these Hopes do manifestly contradict your Experience ; if the longer they are indulged in any bad Custom, the more unwillingly they will forsake it ; if there is reason to fear lest they should in time plead your own Toleration against you, and persevere, contrary to your Will, in those Courses they had your Permission to begin ; if unhappy Instances abound, which may convince you that these Observations are grounded upon Experience ; learn from thence the Danger of allowing your Children to practise any Custom, while you think their Years may excuse it, from which it will be afterwards necessary they should abstain. I conceive we may venture to invert the Maxim of *Solomon*, and assure you with equal Truth, That if you train up a Child in the Way he should NOT go, *when he is old, he will not depart from it.* When the whole Order of Nature is changed ; when the *corrupt Tree bringeth forth good Fruit* ; when you shall see Men gathering *Grapes of Thorns, and Figs of Thistles* ; then, and not till then, will it be found true, that suffering Children to walk in the sight of their own Eyes, is the Way to bring them up *in the Nurture and Admonition of the Lord.*

My Reason for dwelling so long upon this Topic, was thinking it of all others the most likely to engage your Attention ; for if a Man will not suffer me to persuade him to do every thing in his power to promote the everlasting
Happiness

Happiness of his Children, he would certainly be deaf to every Admonition I could offer.

Most of what I have said may without Repetition be applied to the Relation between Masters and Servants.

I should now say something to excuse so tedious a Discourse, did not I flatter myself that the Importance of the Subject is sufficient Apology. It became me to speak upon this Occasion with the Freedom of your Minister, and I hope I have done it with the Candour of your Friend. As many of my Auditors as stood in no need of this Admonition, will be so far from being offended with the Liberty I have taken, that they will consider me in effect as recommending their Example, and proposing *them* for the Imitation of their Neighbours. I know the good Order which is observed in some Families, the Aim of this Discourse is to introduce it into more. But if, after all the Trouble I have given you, the Fruits of this Attempt should vanish in a little present Amusement; if you content yourselves with barely approving my Advice, and let all Thoughts of putting it in practice die with your Conversation about it, you will give me infinite Concern, and almost discourage me from expecting to do any good by future Exhortations. It will then be natural for me to believe, when I am discharging an indispensable, though indeed the most unpleasant

fant Part of my Office, and venture to point out any Errors which want the Care of a Reformer, that you will think I have mistaken my Business with you; that it is merely your Entertainment you expect I should labour for, and not your Edification; that if I ever hope to please, it must be by the Amusement I afford, by gratifying a Curiosity like that of the *Men of Athens*, and being able to tell *some new thing*; not by suiting my Discourses to the real Exigencies of my Hearers, but by condescending to do the low Office of a *sounding Brass*, or a *tinkling Cymbal*.

I have run over in my Mind the various Disappointments that attended the Sower in the Gospel, *Matth. xiii.* and dare not flatter myself with hopes of being so fortunate as to escape them all. Part of what I have upon this Occasion sowed amongst you, I must perhaps submit to see *trodden down by the Way's Side*, *withering upon stony Ground*, or *choked amongst Thorns*; yet in the greater part of you I please myself with the Expectation of finding the *good Ground*, a rich and fertile Soil, which will *bring forth Fruit unto Perfection*.

I have only one Word more to detain you with in relation to those unthinking Creatures, and barren in all good Works, that fly from the Care of the Husbandman, in whom the Word is never sowed, who give me no opportunity of trying what Improvement they are capable of.

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There are many of these *Spots and Wrinkles* amongst us, that deform the Beauty of our Church. These I doubt there can be little reason to believe are now fulfilling the End of this Discourse, and making the Sabbath a Day of religious Rest. Yet something, I hope, may be done even for their Advantage. It is certain they are a Scandal to their Profession, and do not deserve to be received by us as Brethren; yet neither would I have them entirely disowned. Let us take the Example of our Behaviour towards them from the Dresser of the Vineyard in *St. Luke*, chap. xiii. They are indeed too exact Resemblances of the useless Fig-tree there mentioned, yet let them not be *cast out of the Vineyard* till we shall *dig about them, and dung them*. There is no way of trying what Service this Culture would do them, but by endeavouring to force upon them the Benefit they wilfully reject. It was for the Amendment of such Persons that good Laws were enacted; if therefore the Solemnity in which I trust the Lord's-day will soon appear amongst us, and the good Examples of their better-behaved Neighbours shall have no Influence with them, in these would I seek for their Reformation: And it is very reasonable to hope that amongst those who are intrusted with the Execution of them, they cannot fail of finding Friends who will be always ready to do them the charitable Service of obliging them, as far as possible, to observe

observe a Conformity in Life and Manners with their Fellow-Christians, and by a kind Severity compel them to come in.

We exhort therefore, and charge every one of you to walk worthy of the Vocation wherewith he is called, being fruitful in every good Work, and increasing in the Knowledge of God.

Now to God the Father, &c.

F I N I S.



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